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883 462 manners of the men. A girl is perhaps not as unprotected and alone as she seems, for if any young man attempted to insult her or misbehave, the other women present and the older men would at once put a stop to it. The Min Chia, although a lively, talkative and gay people, have an admirable code of public behaviour and an innate sense of decorum.

Girls and women do other heavy work, made possible by the fact that they never had the Chinese custom of foot [482] binding. A large part of the porterage of goods from the lake shore to the city and from Hsia Kuan is done by women and girls, who also do most of the grass cutting on the higher slopes of the mountain. They assist in the handling [533 461] of boats, and in planting rice fields. This work is usually done by a group of girls working together, who beguile the time by singing improvised songs, always using the same traditional tune. The same kind of song, to the same tune with its prolonged falling final note, is sung by boatmen and by grass cutters on the mountain, and, while the tune is always the same the words are made up for the occasion.

582 When a girl is seventeen years old, or a boy nineteen to twenty, the Min Chia consider it time for them to marry. In practice they will already have been betrothed since childhood and the only thing to be decided is the day which, in accordance with the horoscope of the engaged 583 pair, is most suitable and auspicious for the marriage. The betrothal, which is sometimes concluded when the children are quite small, is arranged by a marriage-broker, usually an elderly woman or man acquainted with both families, for the future bride and groom must never meet before the marriage, and it is not considered good taste for the two families to negotiate directly. The marriage-broker receives no fee for his trouble, but he acts as president of the marriage feast, and is usually the kind of person who

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482 so. The man at the back cannot see the road ahead, and the one in front therefore directs him when the road is rough or when an obstacle is encountered. These directions are given in set formulae framed in rhyming slang, and the rear porter replies in the same manner to show that he has heard and understood. These phrases cannot be literally translated without losing their character, but English equivalents would be, *e.g.*, if the road is wet ahead, the leader says "Slippery place", and the one behind replies "Mend your pace" (*hua te hen—ch'ai te wen*).

Porters and litter bearers are always Ssu Ch'uanese, and usually ragged wretches drawn from the poorest class who have taken to the roads to earn a hard living. Most of them are opium smokers, but though this probably shortens their lives, they do not seem to be any the worse for it when on the road. They spend their entire lives travelling to and fro over these mountain roads, and though unable to read and quite unfamiliar with maps, many porters know every road in south-west China, and can repeat the names of the stage points from Bhamo to Ch'ung King, more than a thousand miles. They never seem to save enough money to retire, for their wages go on opium to ease the pain in their aching shoulders after twenty miles of rough road. The muleteers, who are men of substance, owning their animals and often some land as well, despise these human beasts of burden, who are also strangers from another province.

484 491 Neither muleteers, porters nor travellers have any real protection against bad weather. In the winter months, when most travelling is done, rain is rare and light, but on the high ground it turns to sleet or snow, and conditions can be very bad in such weather. The mud road becomes a slippery slide on which neither man nor beast can keep a sure footing, and the broken stone paving is, if anything, worse